



Office of Gov. Dennis Daugaard

500 E. Capitol Ave.

Pierre, S.D. 57501

(605) 773-3212

www.sd.gov

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Contact: Tony Venhuizen or Joe Kafka, 605-773-3212

BE HEARD ON MISSOURI RIVER MANAGEMENT, by Gov. Dennis Daugaard

Now is the time for South Dakotans to be heard on management of the Missouri River.

The past spring and summer brought unprecedented flooding on the river, and South Dakotans from all corners of the state came together to battle the flood.

Although hundreds of homes were damaged, and some destroyed, hundreds more were largely saved by the urgent and determined action of our citizens. As the flood waters receded, and cleanup commenced, the most often-asked question became: How can we prevent this from recurring?

On Aug. 19 and again on Oct. 17, I met with officials from the Corps of Engineers, together with other Missouri River Basin Governors to discuss future management of the river. Our neighbors along the Missouri River have a great deal in common with us. Each of our states was significantly affected by the flood, and each of our states relies on the river for our economic well-being. From those commonalities we are working to find consensus on policies that will protect our people, physically and economically, in the years to come.

The 2011 Missouri River flood displaced thousands of South Dakotans and brought financial disaster as well. Many South Dakota families lost their homes and businesses. Fortunately, none lost their lives as a result of the river flooding. The flood came with very little warning, but South Dakotans rose to the challenge. From the worst of situations came the best of South Dakota. We banded together and fought back. Homes were lost, but many more were saved. Now that the waters have receded, South Dakotans are cleaning up and rebuilding, using the tools they have always used: hard work and perseverance.

However, another element accompanies closure. It is perspective. We must learn from the events that led to this year's unprecedented flooding. We must question and analyze the decision-making of the Corps of Engineers. We must look at our own response, and ask what we could have done to be better-prepared. We must learn from our experience and be stronger because of it.

What we can do now ...

The Corps of Engineers will be holding a series of public meetings in eight cities throughout the Missouri River basin, beginning Oct. 24, to discuss the 2011-2012 draft Annual Operating Plan for the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System. If you would like to see changes made to Corps management of the river system, you should attend one of the upcoming Annual Operating Plan meetings. The meetings are an opportunity for the public to meet directly with Corps officials and tell them what you would like to see changed in regard to management of the river. The meetings will also include a question and answer session.

The South Dakota meeting will be held Wednesday, Nov. 2, in Pierre at the Best Western Ramkota Hotel. There will also be a meeting in Sioux City, Iowa, on Nov. 3 at the Holiday Inn Downtown. The meetings will be held at 7 p.m.

The draft plan is now available on the Water Management Division's website at: <http://www.nwd-mr.usace.army.mil/rcc/aop.html>

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